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FM AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8030
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 4803
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE IMMEDIATE 1909
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI IMMEDIATE 1917
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 1543
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 1179
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 0761
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0945
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE 0810
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE 0761
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA IMMEDIATE 0855
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFIS/CDR USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 5094

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PESHAWAR 000119

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/2/2019

TAGS: PTER MOPS PGOV ASEC PK

SUBJECT: FATA: ABDUCTED NORTH WAZIRISTAN PREP SCHOOL STUDENTS
RELEASED

CLASSIFIED BY: Lynne Tracy, Principal Officer, U.S. Consulate
Peshawar, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) A kidnapping attempt on June 1 against students evacuating a prestigious preparatory school in North Waziristan Agency (NWA) appears to have been resolved without casualties among the captives. The Pakistani government claims that all have been recovered. According to the government, the number initially kidnapped was eighty. Early high estimates of 400 to 500 kidnapped appear to have been the result of confusion created when the convoy split up during the attack. No group has claimed responsibility, but the incident is reminiscent of South Waziristan militant leader Baitullah Mehsud's spectacular kidnapping of approximately 250 security forces in August 2007. With the Pakistani military gearing up for operations in South Waziristan, militants in the area may be looking for new means of bringing pressure on the military, including mass kidnappings. End Summary.

Razmak Cadet College

¶2. (U) On June 1, a convoy of approximately 30 large vehicles, carrying close to 500 students, teachers, and other staff from Razmak Cadet College departed the college toward the city of Bannu in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). The college, affiliated with the Pakistani army but not a service academy, provides preparatory school education for boys from grades 8-12.

The school draws students from the Waziristans and surrounding areas of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and NWFP as well as from farther afield. Most graduates go on to professional (medical, engineering) universities or military service academies.

¶3. (SBU) Razmak lies on the border between North and South Waziristan and is approximately 100 km west of Bannu. The cadet college is located in the Frontier Corps cantonment in the town.

In late 2007-2008 during the military's blockade of the Mehsud areas in South Waziristan, militants bombarded the cantonment, and several students were wounded. All of the students were eventually evacuated by air, placing an additional strain on

military resources. To avoid a similar scenario, the school decided to evacuate prior to any renewed government campaign in South Waziristan.

Kidnapping Students

¶4. (SBU) FATA Secretariat Secretary for Law and Order Ghulam Qadir told Peshawar Pol-Econ Chief on June 2 that the convoy was traveling through the Baka Khel area of NWA close to the Frontier Region Bannu when armed men attempted to wave it down. The convoy scattered at this point, and the attackers were able to secure only four vehicles. At least one of these vehicles contained only women and children from the families of the school staff and were released by the militants. The remaining vehicles contained 71 students, two teachers, and seven other staff. (Note: Initial media reports of a much higher number of kidnap victims appear to have been created by the scattering of the convoy. The first group to arrive safely reported all other members of the convoy as having been kidnapped when in fact they were pursuing other routes.)

¶5. (SBU) According to Qadir, the militants, who had their own vehicles, proceeded to escort the vehicles of their hostages in the direction of South Waziristan. However, at a check point in the Goryam area, near the South Waziristan border, the militants accompanying the convoy were engaged by the Pakistani security forces manning the checkpoint. After a brief firefight, the militants fled the scene, and the hostages were rescued without casualties.

Comment

¶6. (C) No group has claimed responsibility for the incident.

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Despite some press accounts which have described North Waziristan militant leader Gul Bahader as providing a sanctioned "escort" to the convoy for part of the trip, there is speculation that Bahader who wields significant influence in the area may have had a hand in the kidnapping drama. While the identity of the kidnappers is still to be determined, the impact of a successful spectacular kidnapping of hundreds of students is not hard to discern. In August 2007, South Waziristan commander and Tehrik-i-Taliban leader Baitullah Mesud took hostage approximately 250 security forces and successfully used them as a bargaining chip to broker a peace agreement in the spring of 2008. With the Pakistani military gearing up for operations in South Waziristan, militants in the area may be looking for new means of bringing pressure on the military, including mass kidnappings.

TRACY